

GEORGES BATAILLE

Open Letter from René Char

We are informing you about a subject that the convulsions of our epoch bring to the fore:

*Are there incompatibilities?*

Though today it would seem futile to ask such a question, the resources of dialectics, if one judges from known results, permit a favorable response to *everything*. Favorable, however, does not mean *truthful*, and we propose that the modern question of incompatibilities be examined carefully, *modern* because it effects the conditions of existence of our Time which, one will agree, is both dubious and effervescent. It is affirmed that certain functions of the human consciousness, certain contradictory activities, may be associated and maintained by a single individual without disturbing that practical and healthy truth which human collectivities strive to attain. This may be the case, but it is not certain. Politics, economics, social matters, and what moral standards?

In view of the fact that complaints and legitimate claims are raised, that struggles are undertaken and remedies drawn up, do you not think that if the present world is to rediscover a very relative harmony, its burning diversity, it will in part owe this to the fact that the problem of incompatibilities (a rather pressing problem, a fundamental one even, though willfully conjured away) will have been resolved, or at least seriously posed.

To be sure, in every being there are two-parts Ariel, one-part Caliban, prone to and, in addition, a parcel of an amorphous unknown,

become diamond if Ariel perseveres. If Ariel resigns, a sickness of flies.

To those who wish to answer us, we leave the care of specifying our question's solid grounding or lack thereof, and its viewpoint indicator.

An awkward and unclear questionnaire, one will object. But it is from you, adversaries or sympathisers, that the questionnaire and responses await a beam of light or, at the very least, of candor.

*Empédocle*, 1950